



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

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Report Calls for More Learning Time; California Does with Less

By UCLA IDEA

Yesterday, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a budget just in time for the new fiscal year. The new California budget bridges the deficit by relying on an additional \$4 billion in revenue, which lawmakers expect from an improved economy. However, if the extra money doesn't show up, there will be significant repercussions for the state's classrooms.

If the state does not receive at least \$2 billion of the \$4 billion projected, officials could be forced to shorten the school year by up to seven instructional days.

Many districts have already cut days of school or reduced after-school programs and summer school. For the current school year, the Legislative Analyst's Office reported that more than half of school districts reduced the number of school days, and 30 percent cut a full week. IDEA's latest Educational Opportunity Report *Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011* also documented that 65 percent of state high schools reduced or eliminated summer school.

The risk of taking even more time away from classrooms is inconsistent with efforts to improve achievement and narrow achievement gaps. A recent report from the National Center on Time and Learning mounts research showing the importance of *expanded* learning time in bringing learning opportunities to children living in poverty. While some states are increasing learning time, California is moving backwards.

Summer school is a chance for students to make up failed classes so they can continue towards a timely graduation, or receive remediation. It is a chance to prevent the "summer slide" during which students lose learning gains made during the school year. Also, it is a time to take advanced or enrichment courses.

In Los Angeles Unified, the summer school budget has nearly disappeared over the past three years going from \$54 million to \$3 million. Now, the only classes available are for high school sophomores and juniors in danger of not graduating on time. The lack of summer school opportunities had parents and students scrambling to find alternatives—from charters to private, parochial schools to community colleges. All but a select few charge students. An overwhelming crowd of students and parents showed up in front of a Los Angeles County charter on the first day of summer school registration, but the police were forced to disperse them.

With already reduced options and the prospect of even further cuts to the school year and summer programs, a record number of students living in poverty will continue to struggle to keep up with their classmates. We would do well to reflect on this sobering reality as we enter a long weekend celebrating the principle that all men are created equal.

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